

Domestic Disturbance by lufthexe

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Summary:

It's six months before Hopper gets his first domestic disturbance report since returning to Hawkins, Indiana, and it ends up being old Mr. Crawley screaming at the geese in his backyard again. So when his morning coffee gets interrupted on Tuesday at the ungodly hour of nine a.m., it's all he can do not to simply hang up on Flo. But he writes down the address, takes a last drink of coffee before leaving.

And then he's at Lonnie Byers' house, and he's seeing red.

Domestic Disturbance

It's six months before Hopper gets his first domestic disturbance report since returning to Hawkins, Indiana, and it ends up being old Mr. Crawley screaming at the geese in his backyard again; it happens every year, according to Flo. He can't quite blame the guy; they're some mean fucks for birds.

So when his morning coffee gets interrupted on Tuesday at the ungodly hour of nine a.m., it's all he can do not to simply hang up on Flo, the persistent ring still too shrill to be comfortable while nursing a hangover. But he writes down the address, taking a last drink of coffee before standing to leave. Officer Callahan beats him to the door, popping into his office before he can head out. "Hey Chief, I'm calling in our order to Benny's for lunch, you want anything?"

Fuck, he hasn't even had anything besides coffee yet; lunch was too far off of a concept to even have considered. "It's nine a.m. and you guys are already thinking about lunch," he shakes his head, though the urge to take him up on it is tempting. Benny's got the best burgers in town, but you had to get your order in early if you wanted to beat the lunch rush.

"Nah, I'll pick something up on my way back. Got a 6104 over on Elm street."

Callahan grimaced. "Byers again?" He asked, shaking his head. "He'll be back in the drunk tank before the end of the week."

Hopper would have replied, had he not seen red the minute Callahan said the name 'Byers', halfway out the door already. It had to be fucking Lonnie. The domestic disturbance took on a whole new meaning, as Jim grabbed his hat and his keys, hurrying towards his Blazer.

He hadn't seen the asshole since before he left for the city after graduation, not that it would be Lonnie's first time seeing the inside of the county jail cell. There was little doubt in Hopper's mind that time had not managed to soothe Lonnie's many vices. His grip was tight on the steering wheel as he sped through town, mind turning.

The rage that kept so close to the surface these days reared its ugly head, and whatever level-headed approach he might have used once upon a time in the city was long gone.

It had been years. If that son of a bitch had some poor wife as his new punching bag---god help him, he'd put Lonnie's face through a wall.

By the time he pulled up to what must be the Byers place, Carl was already there, his Crown Vic parked in the driveway. News traveled fast in a town like Hawkins, and word would likely spread by lunchtime about the call.

Throwing the Blazer into park, Jim didn't even bother to close the door as he hopped out; Lonnie was in the yard arguing with Carl, and it was all he could focus on. "The fuck you do now, Byers?" he boomed across the yard, striding over. Lonnie's head shot up, and for a minute Jim thought he saw a flicker of fear before it settled back into age-old loathing.

"Oh, so the big city detective is on the case, now?" Lonnie spat out, looking more than ready to push past Carl and have a go at him for old time's sake.

But Carl had the brains to interrupt. "Chief, we've got a hole in the wall inside, and a terrified four year-old."

It's all Hopper can do not to knock the guy to the ground; as it is, his fists are balled tightly enough that the short stub of his nails are biting into his palms. He'd kill the bastard, make him suffer a bit too, but he had to take care of that poor kid first. Brushing past them to the slightly rundown house, he paused once he reached the hallway. A hole is in the plaster of the wall; it doesn't take a detective to know it came from a fist.

He can only hope the kid wasn't his target, though maybe that'd be expecting too damn much of Lonnie. As it is he's got more than enough evidence to throw the asshole in jail for child endangerment.

He follows the sound of voices down the hallway until he's at the entrance of a kid's room. For a moment, when he peers in, it's Sara's room again, all pink and stuffed animals strewn about, tiny shoes and markers everywhere. He blinks and it's gone; it's clearly a boy's room, the color scheme is different, hand-drawn pictures decorating the walls with a clear space theme prevailing. On the toddler's bed perched what must be the kid's mother, her back still turned to him as she sang softly to the kid, his head buried against her chest.

It's all way too maternal, and the ache that Hopper feels is less nostalgia than agony, more violent grief that feels like a sharp piece of glass between his ribs. He had half a mind to leave them be when he remembers why he was there; that bastard in the yard who clearly couldn't appreciate what he fucking had.

"Ma'am," he interrupted the singing regretfully, pulling his hat from his head.

And then Joyce turned, and the damn thing nearly slipped out of his hands altogether.

She was clearly shocked as well; her eyes widened in recognition, taking a moment before responding. She burrowed the kid into his blankets and promised to be right outside his room, kissing his forehead before turning to Jim.

He'd seen her around town, of course; working at the corner shop where he usually picked up his smokes, but they hadn't exchanged words more than the usual pleasantries, and the same painful condolences. He hadn't noticed a ring on her finger, but that was just as well. It wasn't something he paid attention to; not anymore.

The words were still stuck in his throat as she followed him into the hall, gently closing the door to the boy's room. Sure, Joyce had gone around with Lonnie in high school, but if he had thought for one second she'd marry the guy....

"Hopper?" she asks, drawing him back to the present.

"Fuck, Joyce; Lonnie?" he questioned automatically, harsher than intended, and she instantly bristled, just like back in fucking high school when he had cornered her out by the utility shed and asked her what the hell she was doing with an asshole like Byers.

"Really, Jim?" She shot back, and he tried not to let the whole situation rattle him too much.

"What happened?" he tried to get back on track, attempting to wrap his mind around why someone so full of life had been tethered to a loser like Byers. The thought that *she's* now a Byers nearly made him flinch.

Joyce sighed, though her gaze remained hard. "Lonnie came home still drunk this morning, and we fought. Ended up getting so worked up he punched straight through the wall, which woke Will." He could tell this upset her the most, her eyes darting back to the door of his room. "I think Lonnie frightened him." She adds softly, her gaze sad as her hands fidget against the cuff of her shirt.

She's not telling him everything, not that she owed him that. It's been ten years, and it's not like he's kept in touch. But her shadowed eyes and Callahan's comments prove it's more than just a random occurrence.

"And how many times has this happened in the past month?" He asked, his voice more of a growl than he'd like.

"I don't know," she says truthfully. "It'd be one thing if Will were at the babysitter, or old enough for school. I just hate arguing in front of them."

While it's not much to go by, he can guess at how good of a mother she was by the way she focused only on her son, her eyes darting back to his door intermittently.

"Let me throw the bastard in jail," he asks gruffly, wanting her permission, but knowing he'd do it either way.

Joyce grimaces, looking half-tempted, but looks down. "Hop, I can't afford bail again, and I can't get a sitter this late to watch the boys

during my shift tonight." He can tell from the set of her shoulders she hates admitting this, and he hated Lonnie even more for putting her in such a position. Fucking selfish prick.

Joyce ran her hand through her short hair, glancing toward the damaged wall as the cuff of her sleeve slipped down to reveal bruises.

"Joyce, what the hell are those?" His voice was dangerously low, and she flinched back from him before she realized what was doing.

The blind rage surged to the surface again, as he tried desperately to quell it for her sake. "Joyce, did he touch you?" A steady breath. Don't unholster your gun. "Is that hole in the wall meant for you?" His fists were near shaking as he waited for her reply.

She looked a bit like a deer caught in a pair of headlights before she deflated, pushing up the cuff of one sleeve to reveal thin, pale wrists decorated with a fingerprint of bruises. "It's not that bad, Hop," she tries to shrug it off, her eyes barely meeting his.

He hissed, and all he could think of was Sarah, when she first started to bruise, black and blue up her legs that shouldn't have been from just a fall. It isn't that bad, Daddy, until it was; and the bruises turned out to be killing her, just one of the first signs of a much deadlier disease that had spread too far.

He can only hope Lonnie is not the cancer that will choke the life from Joyce.

"He's going to fucking jail, Joyce," he bites out, far too past the point of caring what she thought was best. "And don't bother to bail him out this time, he could use a few nights in the slammer."

"Hop.." she starts, before he cuts her off again.

"Don't even begin to tell me he doesn't deserve it, Joyce. You may not be sportin' a shiner, but that doesn't mean he didn't lay hands on you."

She looks chagrined at that, undoubtedly angry at him for knowing so much. Just like when they were teens, and trying to get Joyce to open up was like trying to get blood from a stone.

He's about to say something, try to ease the tension when she pushes him against the wall, surprising him as he trips backwards at all the force of a 110 pound woman who is close enough to pull him by collar and threaten him. "Don't you say anything to them, Jim. It's bad enough in the shop with those rumors flying, I don't need every churchwife giving me those pitying eyes."

He's too surprised to do much more than nod; he hadn't thought Joyce still had it in her to push him around. Though he could understand her fear. Hadn't he moved back to Hawkins for the very same reason? While the city might have been bigger, there was still too many people that knew, that stopped him at the grocery store to give him their condolences and watched him out of the corner of their eye, greedy to spread rumors about the grief-stricken detective and just how far he had let himself go now that his little girl was gone.

Joyce backs away, the fire in her eyes gone as quick as it came, and pulls the sleeve of her shirt back to down to her wrist.

"Listen..Joyce, don't worry about the boys tonight, I'll get Flo or someone to watch 'em, alright?" The tension eases from her shoulders a bit at that, glancing up at him.

"Just don't let me catch you anywhere near the station, you understand?" He demands, watching her. Her eyes harden again, but she nods, and then glances back to Will's door.

"Go on," he says, "I'm sure Carl's got Lonnie back to the station by now. I won't even get my chance to break his nose." He gets half a smile at that, and figures it's the best he's gonna do today.

He's about out the door when he hears her whisper "thanks, Hop," a sleeping toddler cradled against her shoulder as she edges out of his bedroom again. He nods, slipping his hat back on his head as he crosses the yard to his Blazer.

Fuck.

Fuck.

Of all people Lonnie could have gone and married...he doesn't even

let himself go down that path before he peals out of the yard. If he goes back to the station, he's going to kill Lonnie. If he goes home, he'll end up in a pill-induced coma until tomorrow afternoon. Hell, even the bar is off-limits right now, it's ten in the fucking morning and no one in their right mind is gonna open up and serve whiskey to an on-duty cop.

Benny's it was, then.

It may not have been much, but there was a cooler in the back with a couple of twelve packs that Benny kept for after-shift, and after the morning he'd had, coffee just wasn't going to cut it. He's banging on the back door before he realizes it, half-angry with pent-up adrenaline and not knowing what to do with himself. He should go back to the station, work on his reports, go on another call, but all he can think about is Joyce and how she had flinched from him when he had reached for her bruised wrist.

"You know we don't open for another hour, Jim, what the hell do you want?" Benny is yelling at him, smiling and unlocking the screen door as he folds down his apron to his waist.

"When did Lonnie fucking Byers marry Joyce?" He demands, and Benny grimaces, swinging the door open for him.

"God Jim, I thought you knew. Didn't even think to mention it." Benny's far too used to Hopper to be offended by the way he storms into the door, heading straight for the beer cooler. "I forget how long it was after you left, maybe a couple years, but Lonnie got Joyce knocked up, and well--it's Hawkins. You either get married or you move away, not much option there. I guess they figured they'd give it a go, but it didn't seem to change much with Lonnie."

Jim snorted in response, still fuming. That had been a fucking understatement. Lonnie might have been an asshole in high school, but so were most kids. Most grew out of that; clearly nothing had changed with him. Even being a father hadn't...another long draw on his beer, and then he was fishing for another one. Benny looked at him sympathetically. "Did she tell you, or...?" He asks, and Jim's about to dive straight into the whole fucking story when he remembers himself.

"Something like that," he grits out, and goes back to the beer. Benny stays with him for a bit, but after getting not much more than a few grunts as a response, he returns to the kitchen, leaving Hopper to fend for himself in the back. It's not so bad; the sounds of the kitchen and the chatter of the customers filtering in is distracting enough that he doesn't have to think too much about the idea of Joyce wearing a white dress and happily reciting her vows in the little brick courthouse three streets away.

By the time he's sober enough to drive, it's well past when his shift is over; hell, he had barely managed to call Flo and ask her about watching Joyce's kids. He's headed towards his trailer, only a few streets away when he pulls a hasty u-turn and puts on the siren. Passing out on the couch with a cocktail of sleeping pills would have to wait.

He's got a nose to break.